

First Things First - Arizona



Purpose: To increase the quality of, and access to, the early childhood development and health system that ensures a child entering school comes healthy and ready to succeed.

Background: In November 2006, Arizona voters passed Proposition 203, a citizen's initiative to enhance early childhood development and health services for children from birth through age five. The initiative included a dedicated funding source – an 80-cent tax increase on tobacco products – to ensure that the future of this long-term early childhood investment was not subject to the annual state budget process and so funds would not have to be diverted from other state programs.

Proposition 203 was designed to create an early childhood development and health system with the following principles: local representatives come together to plan and administer what works best in their respective community; is flexible enough to accommodate the unique demographics of our state; and, it must be transparent and accountable for outcomes.

With its passage, the Proposition created a new state-level board known as the Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board. The Board subsequently adopted the name “First Things First” to reflect the importance of early childhood experiences as the foundation for future success.

Structure: The statewide First Things First Board is made up of nine members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the state Senate. The Board has three non-voting *ex officio* members: the Director of the Department of Economic Security, the Director of the Department of Health Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or their chosen designees. The Board's central focus is set policies, identify system priorities, and approve funding to add to, build on or improve the programs, services and resources already available to support young children and their families.

First Things First's 31 Regional Partnership Councils represent the richly diverse communities across Arizona. Members of each Regional Council are appointed by the Board and have direct responsibility to: collect information on the strengths and desires of their community; prioritize the specific needs of children from birth through age five; plan how to address those needs; choose who to partner and collaborate with to ensure success for the children in their area; and, allocate the funding necessary to carry out their plan.

Each Regional Partnership Council is comprised of 11 local volunteers and includes: a parent of a child five years or under; a child care provider; an early education provider; a health representative; a school administrator; a member of the faith-based community; a business representative; and, someone involved in philanthropy. There are three at-large seats with no specific background required, although if a tribal nation is part of a region, a public official or employee of the tribe will fill one of the Council seats.

Funding: State law sets aside 81 cents of every dollar collected from the initiative's tobacco revenues to fund local programs and services for children from birth through age 5 as identified by the 31 FTF Regional Partnership Councils. An additional 9 cents of each dollar is set aside to fund statewide early childhood development and health initiatives, as determined by the statewide Board. The remaining 10 percent of funding is set aside to fund operations, including staff to support the Regional Councils and statewide Board.

The nation's on-going economic crisis and several marketing campaigns aimed at reducing smoking have affected First Things First revenues. In FY 2010, FTF expects to receive \$131.2 million from tobacco taxes – that's 11% less than the amount received in FY2009 and 20.4% less than the amount received in FY 2008.

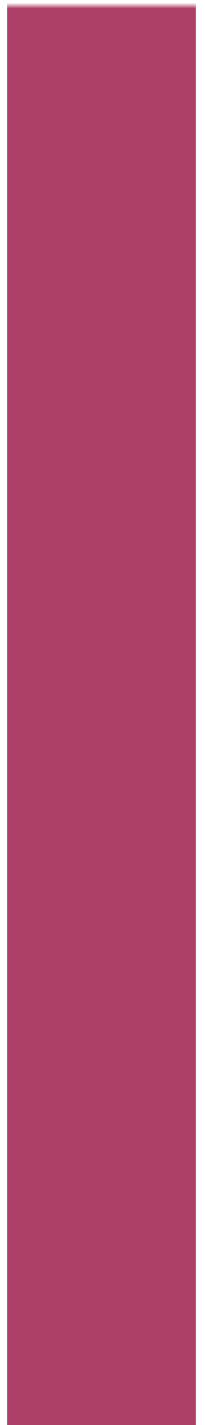
Funding Priorities

In Fiscal Year 2010, the distribution of designated program funding is as follows:

- **\$27.9 million - Supported Parents and Families:** First Things First supports parents and families by providing families with a free Arizona Parent Kit when they take their newborn baby home from the hospital. Arizona Parent Kits contain a Parent Guide, 6 DVDs/videos on child development, health and nutrition, safety, child care, early literacy and discipline, and a picture book for families to read to their baby. First Things First also supports parents and families in their local communities by providing education and resources on topics such as child development, early literacy, prenatal health, and parenting skills. Families may voluntarily access this information through home visiting programs (or home-based child development coaches), or through other organizations and venues in their area.
- **\$53.8 million – Quality Early Learning Opportunities:** First Things First supports quality early learning opportunities by helping early care and education providers obtain one-on-one coaching and financial resources to improve the quality in their early learning setting. This voluntary program, called Quality First, will also offer families information on quality early learning opportunities so they can make good choices for their children. Additionally, First Things First funds education and training for child care health consultants, who are experts in child health and are resources to child care providers to assure that children in their care are safe and healthy. First Things First also supports working parents and quality early learning for children in their local communities by providing early care and education scholarships for families, and by increasing enrollment capacity in quality programs.
- **\$12.4 million – Educated Teachers and Caregivers:** First Things First supports educated teachers and caregivers by providing scholarships for specialized college coursework leading to certification and degrees in early childhood development and education. First Things First also supports quality early learning in local communities by rewarding teachers who obtain their certification or degree and stay in their position for longer periods of time. Additionally, First Things First funds high-quality training for child care providers, and supports recruitment efforts to increase the number of quality caregivers.
- **\$19.9 million – Healthy Children:** First Things First supports healthy children by providing physicians and families with information and resources about child development. First Things First also funds specialized education and training for mental health consultants who are experts in the social and emotional development of young children, and speech language therapists who help children who need some assistance with feeding and language development. First Things First also supports healthy children in their local communities by identifying health insurance options, connecting families to consistent health care, and promoting the screening of children for medical or developmental issues that affect their ability to grow or learn. Families are also provided with information and resources on nutrition, healthy weight, physical activity, and injury prevention.
- **\$3.8 million – Public Education and Awareness:** First Things First supports public education and awareness by providing accessible information and resources on early childhood development and health and the benefits of this investment for every citizen of Arizona.

Accountability

In order to gain support for continued investment in early childhood – by both the public and private sector – it is critical that we have documented evidence of the success of First Things First's efforts.





At the end of fiscal year 2008, First Things First established a partnership with a consortium of the state's three public universities to conduct a longitudinal study to answer the following questions:

- Are children healthy and ready for school?
- Do families have improved access to quality early childhood services?
- What impact have First Things First Investments had on children and families?



The consortium includes representatives of Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona in fields such as early childhood, educational psychology, medical and community health, and anthropology.



The consortium will be conducting two studies at the same time. The first project is a readiness study that will represent a "snapshot" of 1,200 kindergartners over the course of five years. Almost 90 schools will be randomly selected in each study year. The second project is a cohort study that will follow more than 8,500 children as they grow over a period of five years, with data collected at various intervals. Both projects will include developmental assessments of the children, health measures of the children and interviews with parents and teachers.

This endeavor represents a \$ 27 million grant from FTF over 5 years. And, it also represents the most significant early childhood longitudinal study being conducted in the United States today.

In addition to our work on statewide evaluation, every strategy proposed by our Regional Partnership Councils and approved by the statewide Board is required to include evidence that the strategy is effective and specific outcome measures by which we will gauge the success of that strategy in that community.

Systemic Collaboration and Coordination – Arizona Early Childhood Task Force

When Proposition 203 passed, Arizona, like many other states, had early childhood services scattered across several agencies. The quality of those services varied, and the models for service delivery were sometimes new and sometimes older. The services also varied in terms of how quickly they could respond to the needs of children and their families, because programs often operated independently in silos and were not coordinated in a systemic manner.

First Things First has convened the Arizona Early Childhood Task Force, charged with identifying what Arizona's desired early childhood system looks like, how the services in that system should be coordinated and identifying both the public policy and programmatic priorities we need to focus on in the next 3 to 5 years to move us toward the realization of that system. It is important to identify the role of First Things First in this framework, and where resources should be targeted to achieve desired outcomes. This framework will provide the basis for the work of First Things First over the next 3 to 5 years.



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